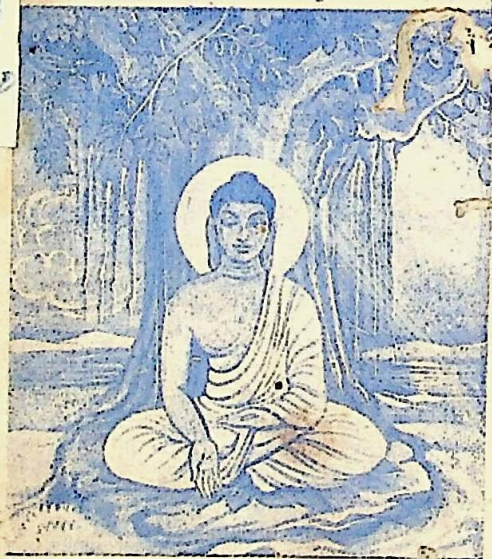


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Buddha and His Message



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By

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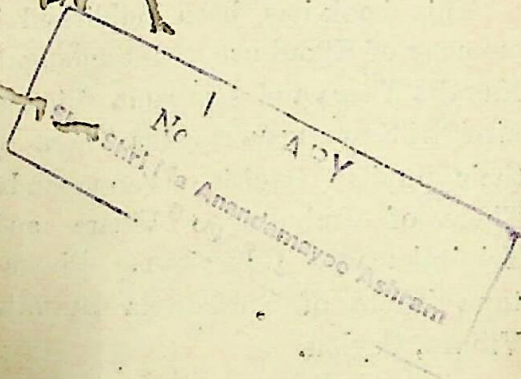
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This book has been published in memory of Elkaduwe Sri Sumangala Nayaka Thera and Alutgama Vinaya-kirti Sri Sumangala Nayaka Thera by their pupils Asgiriye Pannananda Thera of Imbulpitiye Vihara and Tripitakacarya Udurawana Piyaratana Thera of Gurulawela Bowatta Vihara, Ceylon.



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A WORD

The following pages give a brief account of the life of Lord Buddha and the Four Noble Truths which constitute His assential teachings. Hope this will give the general reader a clear idea of the Master and his message.

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U. Dhammaratana

BUDDHA AND HIS MESSAGE

The birth of Lord Buddha is the greatest event of human history. He lived in the sixth century B. C. He was the son of queen Maya and king Suddhodana of Kapilavastu—a small Himalayan kingdom. His name was Siddhartha. He was brought up in the comforts and luxury worthy of a prince. He was also educated in arts and sciences meant for princes of his day. When Siddhartha came of age

he ~~was~~ married to the beautiful princess Yasodhara. Early in life Siddhartha was given to deep contemplation on that universal problem—the problem of suffering. His beloved father took every care to keep him in the midst of sensual pleasures, away from the sight of the miseries of the world. This arrangement of the anxious father was not to be successful. Day and night the great problem kept on revolving in his mind. At last he made up his mind to renounce the ~~world~~ and go out in search of a panacea for the suffering humanity. Thus at the age of twenty nine, in the prime of his youth, prince Siddhartha

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left behind all that was near and dear to him and became a religious mendicant—a seeker after truth.

He went to the well-known teachers of his day for the solution of the great problem. He learnt their systems and underwent their spiritual disciplines. But none could offer him a satisfactory solution. Failing all other methods, he resorted to the path of asceticism. For six long years he practised the severest of austerities. As a result he was reduced to a skeleton and he was on the verge of death. In his later life the Buddha used to describe his penances in the following words:

“I made my abode in a fearsome

forest where such horror reigned that the hair of whomsoever was not sense-subdued, stood on end with terror on entering that dreadful place. My body became lean beyond all measure. Like wasted, withered reeds became my limbs. My eye-ball's gleam, far-sunken in the sockets of mine eyes, well-nigh disappeared. The skin of my abdomen clave to my back-bone, and when I would have stroked my stomach, my hand came in contact with my back-bone. I would topple over for very weakness."

After making that supreme endeavour he realised the folly and futility of asceticism and the necessity of a

healthy mind in a healthy body for achieving the great object he was after. So he avoided the two extremes of a life of self-indulgence and that of self-mortification, and took to the middle path. While leading the life of the golden mean one full moon day he took his seat in that sylvan solitude under the *Bodhi* tree at Buddhagaya and made this firm resolution:

“Let my skin, sinews and bones alone remain, and let my blood and flesh dry up, yet never will I move from this seat without attaining full enlightenment.”

Then there ensued a great battle between the forces of light and dark-

ness. Mara, the evil One, appeared before Siddhartha and said:

“Siddhartha ! why struggle so much ? give up your vain effort; lead a life of ease and comfort while earning merit for a happy life in the next world.”

Siddhartha replied, “Mara ! even the least merit has no use for me. I am not after the accumulation of merit, not after the next world; I am after the solution of the problem of suffering.”

In the spirit of a real *Kshatriya*, a born warrior, he further remarked, “Mara ! I would rather die in the field

of battle than accept defeat and live on."

At last, through his supreme effort, Siddhartha triumphed over the forces of Mara. They were put to flight. As the sun was rising in the eastern horizon the light of wisdom dawned upon Siddhartha. The darkness of night and his ignorance disappeared simultaneously. Siddhartha became *Sammāsambuddha*—a fully Enlightened One. He became *Jina*, a victorious One. The problem of suffering was solved. The solution is given in the four noble truths.

Now for seven weeks the Buddha enjoyed the bliss of emancipation and

made up his mind to give the new message to the world.

First of all he went to the deer park, near Banaras to set *Dharmacakra*, the wheel of law, in motion. He gave his first sermon to five disciples and thus laid the foundation of the kingdom of righteousness. Within a short time he had sixty enlightened disciples and unto them he said:

‘Go ye, O *Bhikkhus*, and wander forth for the gain of the many, for the welfare of the many, in compassion for the world, for the good, for the gain, for the welfare of gods and men. Proclaim, O *Bhikkhus*, the doctrine

glorious, preach ye a life of holiness, perfect and pure."

Thus the Buddha started his great ministry of humanity. The sacred scriptures record vivid accounts of how he travelled from village to village and town to town giving the sublime message of truth, love and peace. So great was his compassion that he would walk miles together for the sake of one person. Hence he was known as *Mahakarunika*, the great compassionate One. His love was boundless. *Maitri* or universal love was one of his favourite themes. He would often instruct his audiences in the following words:

“Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life so should one practise loving kindness towards all beings.” A better simile of pure love than this cannot be found in the whole world.

He was like an affectionate mother and father unto all beings. He made no distinction between man and man. All were equal in his sight. He says, “Even as the five great rivers—Ganga, Yamuna, Aciravati, Sarabhu and Mahi, when they enter the great ocean, leaving their old names behind, become one with it, even so, in this dispensation *Kshatriyas*, *Brahmanas*, *Vai-shyas* and *Sudras* lose their old names

and old descent, and become known as sons of the Buddha.’

Thus the Lord of compassion looked upon all as his children. No life was too insignificant for his attention. From child to aged man, from beggar to king, from the man of piety to the man of the wicked ways—all received his love and compassion. He led them all on the path of righteousness.

Thus he went to the charnel-field to save Kumara, the babe, from the beasts of prey. He who was a neglected orphan became the protector of so many lives. He consoled Kisagotami, the bereaved young mother, who was insane with grief. She, for whom

her only child was all on earth, came to regard the whole world as her own. He converted Angulimala, the murderer, into a saint. The terror of the whole country became a blessing to all. He admitted Sunita, the outcast, into the order of *Sangha*. The scavenger of Rajagriha became worthy of the honour of kings. He raised Ambapali, the courtesan, from the depth of degradation. She whose life was a stigma on society became an example of purity.

All life was sacred for him. As such his compassion was not only for human beings but for all living beings. His whole life was one continuous record of love and compassion.

After serving the world for full forty five years the Blessed One reached the ripe age of eighty. He had fulfilled his mission on earth. The last days of the Buddha, as recorded in *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, were very busy. In anticipation of the great end he was making his last journey visiting assemblies of his disciples and instructing them in the fundamentals of his teachings. At last we see him lying between the twin *Sala* trees at Kusinara surrounded by his disciples.

“Be a lamp unto yourself, be a refuge unto yourself, seek not refuge outside.”

“Hold fast to the lamp of truth, take refuge in truth alone, seek no external refuge.”

“Impermanent are all conditioned things. Be diligent and work out your salvation.”

With these words ‘the teacher of gods and men’ entered into *Mahaparinibbana*.

Two thousand five hundred years have passed since the *Mahaparinibbana* of the Buddha. In the course of this long period in human history many empires came into existence and disappeared, but the kingdom of righteousness established by the *Tathagata* is still existing.

Soon after the *Mahaparinibbana* of the Buddha his gospel was spread far and wide not only in India but also beyond the borders of India. The great missionaries crossed big oceans, vast deserts and mighty mountains, taking his message to far-off lands. His mission developed into a great movement, a mighty cultural and spiritual force which influenced and moulded millions and millions of lives throughout the world. It welded so many nations, with different manners, customs and languages, into one human family. Wherever the message was taken people received it with great rejoicings. It gave them light and

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life, peace and happiness. Thus Lord Buddha brought into existence a cultural empire through the conquest of hearts with the invincible weapon of universal love.

THE MESSAGE OF THE BUDDHA

In course of his ministry of forty five years Lord Buddha delivered numerous discourses. They have been compiled in the Buddhist Canon known as *Tripitaka*. According to the estimate of some scholars the Buddhist canon is eleven times the size of the Bible. So it is impossible for most of the people even to go through a portion of it, not to speak of the whole of it. It is also not necessary to go through

the whole Canon in order to know the essential teachings of the Master. They are given in what are known as the four noble truths. They have been formulated in the form of four propositions : i The noble truth of suffering. ii The noble truth of the cause of suffering. iii The noble truth of the cessation of suffering. iv The noble truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering.

1. In his first sermon delivered at Banaras Lord Buddha has given an account of what he meant by suffering. This is the relevant passage :

“Now, this, O *Bhikkhus*, is the noble truth of suffering : birth is suff-

ering, decay is suffering, disease is suffering, death is suffering, association with those we dislike is suffering, separation from those we like is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering, in short all conditions of existence are suffering."

This is an exhaustive list of the conditions of suffering. Every mortal irrespective of his status or station in life has to pass through the first four conditions of life given in this list—birth, decay, disease and death.

As regards other conditions of life, no one wants to have the company of those one does not like. Everybody tries to avoid the company of such

people. But sometimes the circumstances become such that one cannot but live with them and in some cases it becomes a life-long affair. On the contrary we do not like to leave the company of those who are very dear to us. But in spite of our best efforts sometimes we have to lose them and experience the bitter pangs of separation. If nothing else comes between us, at last death will separate us.

Then again we have our desires, hopes and ambitions which are never fulfilled. When they are not fulfilled we meet with disappointment and frustration. The greater the intensity of desire the bitterer becomes the disa-

ppoitment. At times under the impact of disappointment some people lose their mental balance and resort to the desperate act of doing away with their life—the very centre of their desires.

When these conditions are analysed one by one we can see how painful they are. Every one of us has to face these conditions in our journey through life. These are plain facts which should be clear even to a person of average intelligence.

This is not all. In addition to all this the Buddha says that all conditions of life are painful. So even those conditions which we take as pleasant are included in suffering. This has

got to be understood with reference to the doctrine of impermanence.

Impermanence is a universal fact. There is nothing born or conditioned which is not subject to this universal law. Sensual pleasures are no exception. They are of a fleeting nature. When a person is aiming at the enjoyment of sensual pleasures he or she is doing so with the intention of grasping and retaining the pleasant sensation. But being momentary in nature it eludes the grasp of man. The moment it is touched it is gone. Nothing left and nothing retained. So pleasure hunting is like catching shadows. Hence the logic of the

Buddha's saying that whatever is impermanent is also painful. So even the so called pleasures end in pain. This proves the truth of the statement that all conditions of life are painful.

The present life is not the be all and end all of our existence. The present life is only a drop in the ocean of existence. This is only a stage in the long long journey through *Samsara* or the cycle of birth and death. So when the Buddha speaks of suffering he means the whole process of *Samsara*. With reference to this fact he says :

“Incalculable is the beginning of this *Samsara*; not to be discovered is any first beginning of beings, who,

obstructed by ignorance, and ensnared by craving, are hurrying and hastening through this round of rebirths.

“Which do you think is more : the flow of tears, which weeping and wailing you have shed upon this long way—hurrying and hastening through this round of rebirths, united with the undesired, separated from the desired—this, or the waters of the four oceans ?

“Long time have you suffered the death of father and mother, of sons, daughters, brothers and sisters! And whilst you were thus suffering, you have, verily, shed more tears upon this long way than there is water in the four oceans.

“Which do you think is more : the streams of blood that, through your being beheaded, have flowed upon this long way, these, or the four waters of the four oceans ?

“Long have you been caught as dacoits, or high-waymen, or adulterers; and, through your being beheaded, verily more blood has flowed upon this long way than there is water in the four oceans.

“And thus you have long time undergone suffering, undergone torment, undergone misfortune, and filled the graveyards full; verily, long enough to be dissatisfied with all the forms of existence, long enough to

turn away and free yourselves from them all.

“There will come a time, when the mighty ocean will dry up, vanish, and be no more. There will come a time, when the mighty earth will be devoured by fire, perish, and be no more. But, yet there will be no end to the suffering of beings, who, obstructed by ignorance, and ensnared by craving are hurrying and hastening through this round of rebirths.”

So if we are to understand the full significance of suffering we have to take a view of the long process of birth and death—that is *Samsara*.

This is the first proposition of the noble truth of suffering.

11. The second proposition is the noble truth of the cause of suffering.

According to some, world is the creation of some external agency. So they ascribe the cause of suffering also to that same agency. According to others life and all that life is heir to is a matter of mere chance or accident. So the question of cause does not arise for them. But according to Lord Buddha, every thing has got a reason behind it. All things and events are related as causes and effects. There is nothing which falls outside the cause-effect relation. So,

like every thing else, suffering has its cause and that cause is to be found not outside us but within us.

Now, what is that cause ? It is *Tanha* or selfish desire. The selfish desires are based on egoism. It manifests in different forms. It may manifest with reference to oneself, family, community, nation or race. So if we analyse and study the case carefully it will be quite clear that selfish desires are at the root of all suffering inclusive of all troubles beginning from petty domestic troubles to global wars. Referring to this fact Lord Buddha says :

“Verily due to selfish craving,

conditioned through selfish craving, impelled by selfish craving, entirely moved by selfish craving kings fight with kings, princes with princes, priests with priests, citizens with citizens, the mother quarrels with the son, the son with the mother, the father with the son, the son with the father, the brother quarrels with brother, brother with sister, sister with brother, friend with friend. Thus, given to dissension, quarrelling and fighting, they fall upon one another with fists, sticks, or weapons. And thereby they suffer death or deadly pain."

So selfish desires are at the root of suffering. Desires born of egoism

give rise to various activities. These activities generate *Kamma* or rebirth-producing energy. It is the *Kammic* energy that keeps the cycle of birth and death in motion. Thus *Tanha* or selfish desire is the cause of suffering. This is the second proposition of the noble truth of the cause of suffering.

111. The third proposition is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering. We now know that selfish desire is the cause of suffering. When the cause is removed effect will naturally cease. When desire is destroyed suffering will also come to an end. Cessation of suffering is the negative result and the attainment of the bliss of

Nibbana is the positive result. In other words with the attainment of the bliss of *Nibbana* there will be an end to all suffering.

IV. The fourth proposition is the noble truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering. It is this noble eight-fold path : right view, right aspiration, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. This noble eight-fold path is also known as the middle path as it avoids the two extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification.

The third, fourth, fifth and sixth steps of the path constitute *Sila* or

morality. The last two steps constitute *Samadhi* or meditation. The first two steps constitute *Panna* or wisdom. These are the three stages in the noble eight-fold path. They are closely inter-related.

Morality is the foundation of the life of righteousness. Without moral culture there cannot be meditation or mental culture. In the same way, without mental culture there cannot be wisdom. With the attainment of purity of character the higher levels of consciousness can be reached in meditation. When the highest stage of consciousness has been reached the light of wisdom or intuition will

dawn upon man. Then one can see the true nature of things as they are and not as they appear to us. With the attainment of enlightenment there will be an end to all suffering and one will experience the bliss of *Nibbana*.

So for gaining enlightenment and the emancipation of *Nibbana* one has to tread the noble eight-fold path. It cannot be attained through worship and prayer, rites and ceremonies.

In concluding the few passages on the four noble truths, reference may be made to a certain remark made in certain quarters regarding the doctrine of the Buddha. Certain early writers on Buddhism have character-

ised it as a pessimistic doctrine. There is no doubt that they have made this remark in consideration of Buddha's exposition of the first truth. If the Buddha had stopped with the exposition of the first truth of suffering they would have been justified in calling Buddhism a pessimistic doctrine. But then the Buddha did not stop with that. He also taught the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the path leading to the cessation of suffering. So if an impartial view of the matter is taken it will be quite clear that Buddha's is a doctrine of hope through and through.

In this connection we have to bear

in mind that suffering is the *raison detre* of all religions and religious philosophies. If not for this fact they have no justification for existence. It is for the solution of this problem that people go to religions and philosophies. It is true that there are other questions related to them. But they are all side-issues of this fundamental problem.

RATIONAL FEATURES OF BUDDHISM

In the wake of the development of the scientific knowledge and the rational movement religions built on blind faith, dogmas and mythologies lost their hold on the thinking people. In the light of reason and the scientific knowledge they became discredited. On the contrary with the march of time and the expansion of knowledge Buddhism came into lime-light. This has got to be considered

with reference to what are known as its rational features :

Buddhism is not a Revelation, but the path to deliverance discovered by Lord Buddha through his own efforts. As an enlightened teacher, out of compassion, he taught it to humanity. In doing so he did not ask for the blind faith of the people. He asked them to test its validity in the light of their own reason and experience. On this point Buddha's words to *Kalamas* are illuminating :

“Come, O *Kalamas* ! do not accept anything by mere tradition. Do not accept anything on account of rumours. Do not accept anything merely

because it accords with your scriptures. Do not accept anything as mere supposition. Do not accept anything by mere inference. Do not accept anything simply because it has got a personal appeal to you. Do not accept anything merely because it agrees with your pre-conceived notions. Do not accept anything simply because it is spoken by a person of eminence. Do not accept anything simply because it is spoken by a person held in reverence.

“Kalamas ! when you know for yourselves—these things are immortal, these things are blameworthy; these things are censured by the wise; these

things, when undertaken and performed lead to ruin and sorrow—then do you reject them.

he *Kalamas* ! when you know for yourselves—these things are moral; these things are blameless; these things are praised by the wise; these things, when undertaken and performed, induce to well-being and happiness—then do you live acting accordingly."

These are not the words of a Nationalist of the twentieth century. They are the words of Buddha, the Enlightened One, who lived six centuries before the birth of Jesus Christ. According to the Buddha there is a cosmic law governing the universe.

It is the law of causation operating in the moral sphere. In accordance with it one has to suffer or enjoy the consequences of ones actions. It is not to be influenced through prayer or worship. So there is no place for grace or atonement.

The implication of this moral law is that we are the architects of our own destiny. We make or mar our own life. We build our own hell and heaven. So we have to praise or blame ourselves for what we are.

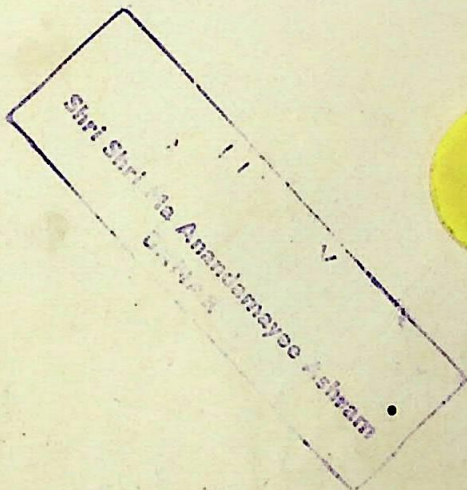
We are not born sinners. So there is no eternal hell. No body is essentially bad. We are only more or less ignorant. So moral progress is a matter of development.

Lord Buddha did not come to us as a special messenger from above. He was one of us. Through supreme endeavour made in course of so many births he attained the state of perfection. The seed of enlightenment is within us all. So through endeavour we too can attain that state.

The ship of life cannot be allowed to sail in the unexplored ocean without direction. Reason serves us the purpose of a compass. So it has got to be directed accordingly. But then reason has its limitations. After reaching a certain stage it too has got to be transcended. By that time the traveller will have reached the other shore.

Buddhism is not circumscribed by time and space. As such it is not for a certain period of time or a certain set of people. Even today the message of the Buddha is as fresh and living as it was some two thousand five hundred years ago. We hear his voice across the ages.

Buddhism is universal in outlook and rational in approach. Because of this fact, of all religions it has the greatest appeal to the modern mind. Now it is time that humanity listened to the message of the Buddha for its own good.



BOOKS ON BUDDHISM

Buddha and Caste System	R.			
Bhikkhu U. Dhammaratana M. A.				
Hand Book of Buddhists				
H. Saddhatissa Thera	1	0	0	
(<i>Tripitakacarya</i>)				
Buddhist Way of Life				
Devapriya Valisinha	0	4	0	
Buddhism as World Religion				
Francis Story	0	4	0	
Why I am a Buddhist ?				
A. B. Govinda	0	4	0	
Sarnath in Pictures				
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